

The Mascota Dance: An Expression of Ybanag Courtship

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Abstract

Mascota is a wedding dance popularized by the Ybanags in the provinces of Cagayan and Isabela. It is performed by the newly married couple or by the other pairs attending a wedding celebration. However, there are no studies cataloguing the Mascota dance, with its moves, music, and costumes. Thus, this study attempted to trace and document the origin of the Mascota dance to come up with a clearer definition of the dance in

its skeletal form and understand more about its history.

With this documentation, Mascota dance will remain a significant landmark of the Valley's history and also an initial attempt to preserve and promote this time-honored courtship dance of Ybanags.

Keywords: *Mascota Dance, Ybanag courtship, Ybanag, wedding dance*

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, most dances are originally patterned after European dances during the Spanish regime. Pandana Ilaw, Cariñosa, Rigodon and Balitao are examples of these dances wherein Filipinos are known for. Aside from these western-influenced dances, ethnic-created dances such as Tinikling made their way to nationwide recognition.

Despite its apparent adaptation to Western dances, Filipinos still pay tribute to their cultural roots. Every district on the island has its folk dance, interpreted attractively in festivals and local shows, which have added to the country's reputed contribution to the world's illustration of traditional arts.

The provincial government of Cagayan has staged the first-ever Tag Gatag (By the Riverbank), a showcase of songs and dances indigenous to the Cagayan Valley Region at the Camaranan Hall of Tuguegarao City to start off the 2009 National Arts Month celebration. The show featured four Ilokano and Ybanag songs and 12 indigenous dances performed by students and teachers of some schools in Cagayan and nearby Isabela towns.

The dances included: Pagayaya Ta Bannag (Riverside dance), Mangaramang (Flat Shrimp Fishing), Aggunetan (River-Climbing Slope), Bangkero (The Boatman), Galluan (Lagoon/Pond), Panagdaklis (Beach Seine Fishing), Lurung (Lobed-River Mullet), Pammangi (Corn-Farming), Aringay

(Aromatic Upland Rice), Tabako (Tobacco Dance), Panagtalon (Lowland Rice Farming), and Pangayaya (Ybanag Courtship Dance).

In her message, Primitiva Talla (2007), provincial museum curator and organizer of the show, lamented that most of the present-day dances, except the wedding dance called Mascota, are foreign-influenced. She would have preferred that the vent showcase the Ybanag Culture.

This study reflects the relatively recent attempt to apply academic thought to understanding why people dance and what the meaning of dance is. It is not just the study or cataloguing of the thousands of external forms of the dance – the moves, music, costumes, etc.- but the attempt to come to grips with dance as existing within the social events of Ybanags, as well as within the cultural history of Cagayanos.

Hence, this study aims to trace and document the origin of the Mascota Dance, to come up with a clearer definition of the dance in its skeletal form, and to understand more about its history. It would also capture the Ybanag values and practices as depicted in the storyline.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on collecting and organizing evidence, and verifying the authenticity of the Mascota dance of Ybanags. Hence, the researcher used the qualitative research design.

The respondents of the study are the Ybanag old folks who know about Mascota's origin.

The researcher drafted the unstructured interview guide to elicit the information needed in this study. The interviewees were identified and an appointment was set with each of them, with a mention of the objectives of the researcher for the preparation of each interviewee.

The interview was recorded, with the knowledge and permission of the interviewee. Follow up questions were raised to clarify information laid by each interviewee. Photos were also taken to document the steps of the dance.

The gathered pieces of information were organized to answer the specific problems to be addressed in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Origin of Mascota

Mascota is a wedding dance popular in the provinces of Cagayan and Isabela. The name "Mascota" was derived from the cut or style of the skirt with large flower prints worn by the lady when she dances the Mascota. It is performed by newly married couples or by other pairs attending a wedding celebration.

The Mascota dance is not taught but is learned as early as puberty age, with each individual developing his or her own style. The Mascota of old was danced to the music of "verso" accompanied by a musical instrument called "sincosinco".

The male dancer, may choose to portray the stance of an aggressive suitor, clicking and clapping his fingers noisily. While the female plays the role of a hard –to-get beauty emoting feminine coyness. The acting prowess of the couple solicits raucous laughter and jesting from the audience of relatives and friends, making the event a gay and boisterous affair.

When the newly married couple is dancing, two plates are placed on the mat which is spread on the floor, one on each side of the couple. All the relatives and friends of the bride put their money and other gifts on the plate beside the groom. The relatives and friends of the groom on the other hand, place their monetary and other gifts on the bride's plate. Each party tries to outdo the other in giving gifts to the couple. After the dance, the bride's groom takes the two plates and gives them to the bride as their common property.

The Values and Practices as depicted in the storyline of Mascota

An Ybanag young lady is reserved and modest in her ways. She is very careful in her dealings with the opposite sex. When a young man starts to speak of his love to her, she does not immediately believe for she is aware that men are good deceivers.

It is but natural for an Ybanag man to court a young woman but it is up to the woman to observe that man, and find out how true and sincere is his love and promises. All young women are therefore warned to study a man carefully and to be sure that he is not pretending or bluffing.

Before an Ybanag young man courts a woman, he must first court the parents. He has to render service to the family of the woman he would like to marry. For them, nothing is painful or difficult when they truly love. An Ybanag is willing to undergo any kind of suffering for the sake of his beloved.

After the woman's acceptance of the love of the sincere man, they will ask the blessings of their parents. Marriage are officiated in the church and celebration usually follows the wedding ceremony with feast and dancing highlighted with a Mascota dance.

Ybanag Interpretation of the Mascota

a. Movement or Steps

When old Ybanag people performed the Mascota dance, they do not have definite steps and figures and they move by covering as much as they want to. The number of figures and depends largely on the mood and ability of the dancers.

The Mascota dance steps as shown below are based from the traditional steps and figures performed by the old people of Camalanuigan, Cabagan and Solana.

Entrance

1. Starting with the right foot, the boy executes three habanera steps forward facing his partner. Right and left hand alternately, he does the masiwak and while the free hand is on waist. The girl stands in place with the hands holding her skirt.
2. Partner bow to each other. The boy opens his arms in second position and the girl holds her skirt while bowing.
3. Repeat #1 but this time the boy moves backward to his proper place.
4. Partners will pause without bowing.



I. Music A

Partners do their movements simultaneously.

Boy:

1. Starting with the right foot, take four close steps forward to finish behind partner with the back to back position, passing the girl by her right shoulder.
2. Take four habanera steps backward to proper place passing girl by her left shoulder. Right and left hand alternately, do the masiwak while free hands on waist.
3. Turn around clockwise in place with four habanera steps. Hands in #2
4. Do the girl's part #1 to #3 below .

Girl:

1. Stand in place while facing the partner.
2. Take four habanera steps sideward, right and left alternately. The right and left hand, alternately do the masiwak.
3. Turn around clockwise in place with four habanera steps. Hands as in #2.
4. Do boy's part #1 to #3



II. Music B

1. Execute a three-step turn right about with heavy steps, moving forward to partner's place, passing each other's left shoulder. Put feet together. Girl holds her skirt while the boy places hands on waist. Boy takes heavier steps than girl. Finish the turn facing each other.
2. Take six habanera steps sideward right and left alternately. Free and on waist and do the masiwak right and left alternately.
3. Turn right (full turn) in place with four habanera steps Hand as in #2.
4. Repeat #1 to #3 going to proper places



III. Music A

1. Repeat figure II (1)
2. Take two habanera steps forward. Hand as in II (2)
3. Girl takes habanera steps sideward, right and left alternately. Hand as in figure II (2). Boy takes four touch steps in front with trunk slightly bend forward and point at foot with forefinger of right and left hand alternately, palms up. The elbow of pointing hand is supported by the back of the other hand.
4. Repeat figure II (3)
5. Repeat all (1-4) this time with the girl doing the touch steps and the boy doing the habanera steps. Partners return to their proper places.



IV. Music B

1. Repeat figure II (1), this time making the steps smaller so that partners finish one line at the center, facing each other (Girl's back toward audience, Boy faces audience).
2. Repeat figure III (2).
3. Repeat figure III (3), the boy claps hands four times instead of pointing at feet.
4. Take two habanera steos forward to partners' place, and two habanera steps to turn right about face partner. Hands as in figure II (2).
5. Repeat all (#1-#4), this time girl will do the clapping. Finish in proper places.



V. Music A

1. Meet at center as in figure IV (1).
2. Take eleven chasing steps moving around once counterclockwise at center. The right hand of the girl

over her head, while left hand is holding her skirt. Boy's hands on waist for eleven count then pause.

Partners are always facing each other while moving counterclockwise.

3. Repeat figure IV (4).
4. Repeat all (1-3) clockwise. Left foot leading in (2). Finish in proper places.



VI. Music B

1. Meet at center as in figure IV (1).
2. Repeat figure V (2), this time the girl does it in place, while the boy does the steps going around the girl counterclockwise.
3. Repeat figure IV (4).
4. Repeat all (1-3), moving clockwise this time. Finish in proper places.

VII. Music A

1. Execute a three-step turn right towards the center. This time the boy finishes facing his own starting place.
2. Instead of putting feet together, he kneels on right foot and half-stands on left. The girl sits on left thigh of the boy. She holds the shoulder of the boy with her right hand, facing the audience.
3. Girl gives her fan to the boy. Holding fan with his right hand, he fans the girl in time with the music. The girl turns her head to right and left sides alternately away from the direction of the fan.
4. Partners stand and repeat figure IV (4).
5. Repeat all (1-4). This time, both are facing opposite directions. The boy is facing girl's place and the girl with back toward the audience. Finish in proper places.



VIII. Music B

1. Execute a three-step turn right towards the center. Finish in one line facing each other as in figure IV (1).
2. Boy kneels again on right foot, half stands on left. The girl gets her handkerchief from her waist with her right hand, left hand holds the skirt and stand in front of Boy.
3. Girl wipes the imaginary perspiration of the boy. She executes four habanera steps sideward, right and left alternately, while the boy keeps still.
4. Partners stand and repeat figure IV (4).
5. Repeat all (1-4). Finish in proper places.

IX. Music A

1. Meet at the center as in figure IV (1).
2. Girl turns around once clockwise in place with mincing steps, heels raised, right foot leading for six measures, right hand overhead, left hand holding skirt. Boy executes six habanera steps forward, moving around the girl counterclockwise. The free foot of the boy is slightly raised before stepping on the first count of each step. He claps his hands in time with the music.
3. The partners take two habanera steps forward to proper places, two habanera steps to turn right about to face partner. Hands as in figure II (2)
4. Repeat all (1-3). Girl turns counterclockwise in (2), Boy turns clockwise while he is doing the clapping again. Girl reverses arm position, while left foot is leading in (2).

X. Music B.

1. Meet at center as in figure IV (1),.
2. Repeat figure IX (2), both will turn clockwise doing habanera steps. Girl looks over her right and left shoulder alternately at her partner. Boy looks at partner while he snaps his fingers forcefully in time with the music instead of clapping hands. Girl's hands as in figure IX (2).
3. Repeat figure IX (3).
4. Repeat all (1-3).

Finale

Partners face each other.

1. Repeat the Introduction (1-3). Finish by facing the audience.
2. Bow before the audience. Hands as in Introduction (2).

b. Number of Participants

The Mascota dance is performed by the newly married couple, the relatives of the bride and the groom, and by other pairs attending the celebration.

c. Relationships of Formations

The Mascota dancers form a circle. They moved around the bride and the groom clockwise then counterclockwise because the Ybanag people believed that it will give unending support to the couple. They also form a straight line which symbolizes that a husband and wife should always be guided with a perfect direction. Facing each other in the dance symbolizes that no matter how easy or difficult life is, they must face it together.

d. Dance Accompaniment

The original Mascota was dances to the music of the “verso” accompanied by a five-stringed guitar called “sincosinco”

e. Costumes and Props

The dance is called as mascota because of the girl’s Mascota skirt and any kind of Casima with stiff panuelo, while the boy wears barong tagalog and colored trousers. However, at this time, the wedding dance is performed even without the prescribed costumes and props, and the dance is still called as Mascota.

Girl has a fan and a handkerchief hanging at the right side of her waist. She may smile at the swooping man, but she must cover her mouth like a shy child. Handkerchief is commonly employed in the Mascota courtship dance because it is a very handy implement in blocking attempted kiss or even just touch from the enamored men.

Mat is spread on the ground where the two plates are placed on both ends. The relative of the bride and groom put money on the plates as their help to the couple in starting their married life.

CONCLUSION

Cagayanos and Isabelinos find music and dance as ingrained in them. At almost all social events, even those informal gatherings held at someone’s home, they are likely to find music, in the form of impromptu songs while someone is strumming the guitar, and numerous opportunities for dance. Mascota courtship dance is one of the cultural identities of these Ybanags. The authentic mascota dance showcase how and why Ybanag people dance the Mascota and what it means. It depicts the courtship techniques of the Ybanags. The modesty of an Ybanag woman and the persistence of a male lover are revealed in the dance. The woman may smile to the man, but she must cover her mouth like a shy child. A handkerchief used in the courtship dance is intended to block attempted kiss or even just a touch from the man, symbolizes the mentioned modesty of the woman.

Mascota dance remains one of the Ybanags’ greatest cultural traditions. Preservation and promotion of the courtship dance serves as a source of pride in the national identity.

REFERENCE

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